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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights selected key findings and discusses several issues emerging from an extended case study of the development and operation of a statewide teacher career ladder enacted into law in Tennessee in 1984. Data for the study were gathered through interviews, observations, elimination of documents, and a survey of selected teachers. The report first describes the origins of the career ladder proposal in Tennessee and the history of the development of the enabling legislation. Major issues raised during the legislature's deliberations are identified. These issues involve the proper roles of the agencies concerned, the characteristics appropriate for a teacher salary and evaluation system, and suitable processes for implementing and maintaining the program. The second section of the report discusses implementation of the career ladder system. The teacher survey found that attitudes concerning the quality of communication about the program were mixed, that those concerning "fast-tracking" to place established teachers higher on the ladder were generally favorable, and that those concerning the teacher evaluation processes used were generally unfavorable. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and with recommendations addressed to those considering implementing statewide career ladder programs. (PGD)

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SHAPING TENNESSEE'S CAREER LADDER PROGRAM

A Report to the American Education Research Association
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"Shaping Tennessee's Career Ladder Program"

A B S T R A C T

An extended case study was conducted at the University of Tennessee under U.S. Department of Education sponsorship to examine the development and operation of a statewide teacher career ladder.

General objectives of the study included: 1) To portray and analyze the formulation and passage of Tennessee's Career Ladder for teachers; 2) To describe and analyze the perceptions of teachers and other key groups prior to and during the first year of program implementation; 3) To develop recommendations to guide future decision making.

During 1984-85, two large scale data collection strategies were carried out to supplement the ongoing procedures of the project (interviews, attendance at meetings, newspaper analyses, and document reviews). First, a 6-district, 18-school field study was initiated in the Fall of 1984 to determine through interviews the nature of program implementation and related perceptions.

Second, a statewide survey was mailed to a stratified sample of 2,100 teachers. Responses (1039) to this instrument provided detailed information about three areas indicated through the interview process to be particularly critical to Career Ladder operation: communication, the evaluation process, and the method (called fast-tracking) used to facilitate entry of large numbers of current teachers to Career Level I.

The paper highlights selected key findings and discusses several pertinent issues emerging from this investigation.

INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Career Ladder Program was one of the first statewide programs to be enacted. It remains one of a select number of such reform efforts to have developed a uniform framework for teacher evaluation and advancement, rather than leaving to local district initiative the creation of the specific incentive program in use. Tennessee's model does include local involvement in evaluation at the Probationary, Apprentice, and Level I stages of the teacher Career Ladder, subject to state guidelines and approval. Access to the two upper rungs (Levels II and III), corresponding generally to at least eight years of teaching experience by applicants, is strictly governed by intensive state-conducted evaluation procedures.

This paper reports major conclusions of an extended case study conducted at the University of Tennessee under U.S. Department of Education (Secretary's Discretionary Fund) sponsorship. The project, carried out between October, 1983 and June, 1985, examined the development and initial operation of the statewide teacher career ladder. Although the original design had been predicated on the probable enactment of the career ladder (then designated "master teacher plan" during 1983), the controversy surrounding passage of this and other education reform measures resulted in delayed enactment by the 1984 Legislature. Implementation of the Career Ladder was placed on a rapid timetable, with instrument field trials as well as eligibility, application, and numerous other types of policies and procedures being developed concurrently under State Department of Education direction.

During the 1984-85 school year, the teacher career ladder moved toward full implementation in the schools. Using a one-time process referred to as fast-tracking, individuals currently teaching and who met basic eligibility requirements could apply for entry to Level I via one of five routes. A salary supplement or "bonus" of $1000 was earned by those attaining Level I status. Most teachers eligible for Level I applied, but fewer of those eligible chose to apply for advancement to the upper two career levels during the first year of implementaion. At the end of the 1984-85 academic year, state figures indicated that of the 24,342 persons eligible for levels II or III only 9,406 had applied, with reports emerging in February, 1986 indicating that approximately twenty percent of these had withdrawn their applications. It should be noted that for future teachers and those whose Tennessee service began with the 1984-85 school year, participation in the Career Ladder Program is mandatory.

Table I, taken from the 1985-86 Teacher Orientation Manual issued by the Tennessee Department of Education, depicts the career ladder structure and supplements. In recent deliberations of the Interim Certification Commission and State Board of

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TABLE 1

Description of Tennessee Career Ladder

NEW TEACHERS AFTER JULY 1, 1984

CAREER LEVEL	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TO QUALIFY	CERTIFICATE LENGTH AND DURATION	WHO EVALUATES?	CONTACT DURATION	STATE SALARY SUPPLEMENT
Probationary	0	One-Year Nonrenewable	Local	10 Month	0
Apprentice	1	Three-Years Nonrenewable	Local State - 3rd Year Review	10 Month	To be Determined By State Board of Education
Career Level I	4	Five-Years Renewable	Local - 2 times in five years State - 5th Year Review	10 Month	$1,000
Career Level II	9	Five-Years Renewable	Local - Once in 3 Years State - two times during five-year period	10 Month 11 Month	$2,000 $4,000
Career Level III	13	Five-Years Renewable	Local - Once in 3 Years State - two times during five-year period	10 Month 11 Month 12 Month	$3,000 $5,000 $7,000

TEACHERS EMPLOYED AND CERTIFICATED AS OF JULY 1, 1984

CAREER LEVEL	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TO QUALIFY	CERTIFICATE LENGTH/DURATION	WHO EVALUATES?	CONTRACT DURATION	STATE SALARY SUPPLEMENT
Career Level I	3* Years	5-Year Renewable	Local - Minimum of two times in 5 years State Review - 5th Year	10 Month	$1,000
Career Level I	8** Years	5-Year Renewable	Local - Once in 3 Years State - 2 times in 5 years	10 Month 11 Month	$2,000 $4,000
Career Level III	12*** Years	5-Year Renewable	Local - Once in 3 Years State - 2 times in 5 years	10 Month 11 Month 12 Month	$3,000 $5,000 $7,00

*Teachers with less than three years of experience who were employed and certified on July 1, 1984 may apply for Career Level I Certification when they obtain the three year experience and other applicable requirements.

**Teachers with less than eight years of experience who were employed and certified on July 1, 1984 may apply for Career Level II certification when they obtain the eight year experience and other applicable requirements.

***Teachers with less than twelve years of experience who were employed and certified on July 1, 1984 may apply for Career Level III certification when,they obtain the twelve year experience and other applicable requirements.

Source: Tennessee Department of Education (1985) Teacher Orientation Manual.

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Education, temporary reductions in the mandated number of local evaluations for Level I and other changes responsive to pressures experienced by school officials have been approved or recommended for legislative action. It is suggested that detailed information about regulations and procedures be obtained directly from the Department of Education to ensure inclusion of the most recent modifications in Career Ladder operations.

Objectives

The twenty-month case study project was conducted in phases corresponding to the development of the Tennessee Career Ladder Program. Major emphasis was placed on analyzing the events and issues that gained importance, and deriving implications for those planning or undertaking their own state or local career ladder programs.

General objectives of the study included: 1) To portray and analyze the formulation and passage of Tennessee's Career Ladder for teachers; 2) To describe and analyze the perceptions of teachers and other key groups prior to and during the first year of program implementation; 3) To develop recommendations to guide future decision making. Specific objectives were set forth for each component of this multi-faceted project.

Methods and Data Sources

In order to achieve this descriptive study's intended results, several different data collection activities were carried out. Multiple interviews were conducted with a number of the leading figures associated with each major group involved with or affected by the Career Ladder Program. These groups included: Governor's office; State Legislature; State Department of Education; Interim Certification Commission; Tennessee Education Association. Meetings and reports of these and other groups (e.g. Teachers' Study Council) were monitored, and appropriate document analyses conducted.

During 1984-85, two large scale data collection strategies were carried out to supplement the ongoing procedures of the project (interviews, attendance at meetings, newspaper analyses, and document reviews). First, a 6-district, 18-school field study was initiated in the Fall of 1984 to determine through interviews the nature of program implementation and related perceptions. The target schools, located in various regions of the state, were contacted during the year and in late Spring, 1985 to study changes in program operation and staff perceptions. Second, a statewide survey was mailed to a stratified sample of 2,105 teachers. Responses to this instrument provided detailed information about three areas indicated through the interview process to be particularly critical to Career Ladder operation: communication, the evaluation process, and the

method (called fast-tracking) used to facilitate entry of large numbers of current teachers to Career Level I.

EARLY STAGES/LEGISLATIVE PASSAGE

Governor Lamar Alexander proposed his Master Teacher Program on January 28, 1983 in a widely publicized speech to the Tennessee Press Association. The program included four career stages, each one offering the teacher a five-year certificate. The career stages (Apprentice, Professional, Senior, and Master) would allow for upward mobility each five years or an opportunity to renew the five-year certificate and remain at the same career level. An exception was that an Apprentice Teacher would have to successfully advance to the Professional level in five years or seek a new career.

The governor made an early commitment to get the Master Teacher Program, part of a 10-point Better Schools program, adopted. He and his aides devoted a major part of their time in promoting a program that the governor described as being the most important proposal he would make while in office. Publicity efforts were extensive. Speaking tours were conducted both in and out of state; selected audiences were sent brochures and newspaper clippings about the program; teachers received bi-weekly newsletters; and several lobbying groups were established.

The governor portrayed his program as one that had emerged from deliberations of a Legislative Task Force and recommendations from teachers, higher education, and business. The Tennessee Education Association (TEA) did not view teacher input as being a significant factor. TEA also objected to several aspects of the program itself (e.g. handling of tenure, negotiations, fair evaluation procedures).

Several versions of the Master Teacher Bill were proposed, including a "Compromise Bill," in an effort to gain greater support for the program. This was not accomplished by April, when the bill was deferred for a year to be studied by a special legislative committee. During this period, an Ad Hoc Interim Certification Commission was appointed to develop the proposed new program. Several staff members from the State Department of Education were assigned special duties pertaining to development and promotion of the program. A Better Schools Office was created in the State Department to house staff working full time on the program and to act as the center of operations for the program. A Teachers' Study Council was organized in part as a statewide forum to offer opportunities previously unavailable for teachers to study the program and communicate their views.

The resolution of this protracted discussion and behind the scenes action was an outgrowth of a special legislative session convened by the governor during January, 1984. The first such session in 17 years, this Special (Extraordinary) Session was devoted to education reform and its financing. Agreement was reached in late February and the Comprehensive Education Reform Act became law, taking effect in July, 1984.

The study of this initial phase of the Career Ladder Program was accomplished through a variety of techniques. Interviews were conducted on at least one and generally two to three occasions with several leading representatives of the major "constituent" groups: Governor's Office, Department of Education, Ad Hoc Interim Certification Commission, Tennessee Education Association, State Legislature (including Legislative Oversight Committee), Teachers' Study Council, consultants to the State Department, and State Board of Education. Additionally, a project staff member attended legislative sessions preceding and during the Special Session; recorded and analyzed key meetings of several groups listed above; and analyzed written records of the legislative sessions as well as Commission and Board meetings. Speeches, media coverage, publications emanating from the Governor's office and Department of Education, and published materials of the teachers' organizations were also examined.

Findings from this tracking of the initial presentation and legislative acceptance of the Career Ladder Program are presented in detail in the Part I Report (Handler and Carlson, 1984). A focused look at issues and concerns identified through analysis of the legislative debate follows. It is hoped that this overview serves to illuminate a number of important considerations that would continue to surface in various forms throughout the study. While the specific political processes would be expected to differ in other settings, the types of things that were of interest to key individuals or groups may be representative of issues that will surface in any such debate. Among the pertinent issues that were observed during the Tennessee legislature's deliberations were:

1. Whether a particular salary or incentive structure (e.g. pay raises for all teachers or for some meritorious teachers) would help improve educational outcomes or attract better teachers.

2. The proper relationship between state and local school systems' evaluation processes (e.g. which should have priority in certification and other decisions).

3. Whether evaluation should be required of all teachers, and in particular whether career ladder participation should be required.

4. The appropriate role of written tests in assessing teaching performance, particularly at a higher career level.

5. The appropriate number of years before a teacher should be able to reach the top of a career ladder (and various levels in between).

6. The role of higher education in teacher evaluation

7. The steps that could or should be taken to see whether a career ladder plan is affecting teaching quality.

8. The extent to which class size and other working conditions represent contributing factors in teacher performance and motivation.

9. The likelihood that "make work" jobs would be created for teachers who elect to work on an extended contract basis.

10. The type of governance structure at the state level that is most appropriate for carrying out the Career Ladder Program and other reforms.

11. The steps that could or should be taken to help assure a more balanced distribution of higher career level teachers across school districts (even those with little financial support for education).

12. The appropriate legislative role in future oversight of the education reform program.

It should be noted in this context that the 1985 legislative session surprised education observers who expected a fight over the revision of the controversial CERA. The key participants in 1984's battle over the program all adopted a "wait and see" attitude during the revision process. They opted to let the program work one full year before substantively changing it and, despite the insistance of several legislators that a state income tax is necessary to finance future expenses, the legislature again postponed consideration in favor of other minor tax reform proposals.

IMPLEMENTATION: 1984-85

For 1984-85, entry onto the Career Ladder did not require evaluation under the state approved system. Several "fast-track" options were created, including submission of passing scores on the National Teachers Examination Core Battery, an appropriate Specialty Area Test, or a state-developed Career Ladder test, along with a positive recommendation from the local school system. Other alternatives available for first year entry included successfully completing a state approved staff

development program or having a positive evaluation under a local process which has received state approval for this use.

Evaluation data sources specified in the legislation include: classroom observation, review of local evaluations, personal interview, and examination of inservice and professional development activities. The components designed into the state evaluation system were: observation instrument, portfolio of teacher materials, peer questionnaire, student questionnaire, teacher interview, and principal questionnaire. The observation process includes such features as: 3 person teams, multiple visits, pre-and post-observation conferences, and an opportunity for the teacher to request limited changes in evaluation team membership. Some modifications have been made for 1985-86; persons needing information on detailed changes and policies are advised to contact the Department of Education.

Field Site Interviews

During Phase II of the case study, such ongoing procedures as interviews with key constituent group representatives; analysis of published documents and news reports; and attendance at various state, regional, and local meetings were continued. In addition, the implementation phase of the project included a six-district field study. The field site interviews were designed to ascertain how the program was being implemented in various types of school districts and how it was perceived by teachers and administrators. Two sets of interviews (Fall and Spring) were conducted in each school, so that key events and changes could be portrayed. Documenting initial reaction and describing developments associated with the early operation of the career ladder program were believed to be especially important for helping those in other states learn from all facets of the Tennessee experience.

The six school districts cooperating in this project were selected to represent a variety of demographic characteristics including geographic location, type of community, and general socioeconomic level. In each district elementary, middle or junior high and high school levels were represented, with a total of eighteen schools participating. Letters and telephone calls were used to maintain contact between site visits. A total of 178 teachers along with the 18 building principals were interviewed during this phase. This figure represents 27% of the faculty in the participating schools.

A high degree of consistency was evident in the responses obtained across districts. Teachers expressed considerable reluctance to climb beyond Level I of a Career Ladder that they generally regarded as being in an unfinished state. Their collective comments indicated that not being sure what to expect regarding the new statewide evaluation process (e.g. how various

components would be assessed) and being uncertain about the responsibilities they would be expected to assume (e.g. under extended contract provisions for Levels II and III) were common sources of concern. These concerns were not substantially different in the Spring interviews as compared with the Fall data.

The pace of implementation and the difficulty of establishing clear statewide communication were underscored through the interview data as perceived areas of difficulty. Teachers and administrators reported numerous experiences leading to feelings of confusion and frustration. In some cases, the situations perceived as changes in the Career Ladder Program were actually unforeseen special cases requiring decisions about eligibility or comparable issues. As situations arose requiring clarification or revision, interview respondents reported receiving delayed or inaccurate information. Their responses indicated that state evaluators and other staff representing the State Department of Education were found to have incongruent information on procedures and requirements. Adding to the reported problem was the fact that local school district officials also became bearers of outdated or inaccurate information often enough to represent a major concern of teachers and principals interviewed.

After these communication problems arose in the Fall, there were energetic State Department efforts to strengthen this critical area. Among those interviewed, communication was still regarded as a key concern in the Spring, particularly in the rural schools visited. While more teachers now mentioned receiving mailings from the State Department and other sources, there were indications that the peer "grapevine" was still a primary information source in these schools.

Interview respondents were generally supportive of the concept of performance evaluation, but their comments about the specific process developed for Tennessee contained several recurrent themes. There was concern that the procedure as carried out by some evaluators did not provide adequate post-observation feedback. There was also a common worry that it would be too easy under the present program for outside evaluators to misjudge a situation or even to be intentionally misled. Negative reaction was most prevalent concerning the portfolio required for Levels II and III, which was to include documentation of specific aspects of performance across a five-year period. In addition to the preparation required and the perceived weak relationship to teaching behavior, respondents in nearly all schools reported being concerned that factors beyond their control (e.g. lack of leadership opportunities, inadequate resources, burdensome workload) would unfairly decrease their chances of success.

One of the most positive elements associated with the Career Ladder Program was reported to be the staff development model known as TIM (Tennessee Instructional Model). Although not originally created for the career ladder, its inclusion as a fast-track option for the 1984-85 school year brought many teachers into contact with the TIM training modules. These were found by numerous respondents to provide a useful review or pulling together of management, planning, and other aspects of instruction. The primary criticism voiced in relation to TIM was its adherence to a specific approach that seemed to these individuals to limit its applicability to diverse teaching situations.

When asked during the interviews what critical elements would form the basis for recommendations to other states or districts, the most frequent responses underscored the importance of teacher input at the planning stage. Their suggestions focused also on ways to reduce the paperwork and duties that were perceived as burdensome, as well as increasing salaries to levels more appropriate for their training and responsibilities. During the Spring interviews, teachers and administrators reiterated earlier recommendations and stressed in addition the critical need for improved measures to ensure evaluator skill and consistency. Steps taken to clarify purposes, streamline procedures, and slow the pace of implementation were also deemed quite important.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument developed to study initial implementation concentrated on three major areas: communication, the fast-tracking process, and evaluation procedures. An elementary, middle, and high school "triple" was selected within each of the 18 Teachers' Study Council divisions partitioning the state. Based on faculty counts within each of the 54 schools, 2105 surveys were distributed in late February, 1985. The response rate was 49%, with 1039 returns.

The first item asked respondents to assess the quality of communication they had received about the Career Ladder Program. Results indicated a substantial level of concern, with 40% specifying "some concerns" and 23% "strong reservations" [The other two response options were "generally favorable" (33.7%) and "very positive" (3.3%)]. In order to obtain the most specific and accurate information possible about the communication that took place, those surveyed were asked several questions about eleven common data sources (e.g. State Department Mailings, School System Central Office, Tennessee Education Association Staff). Their responses included: whether they had used each source, whether they obtained the information sought, and whether the information was accurate, as well as examples or comments they wished to provide concerning the specific data sources.

The sources of Career Ladder information that were reported as being used most often were: peers (80.7%), TEA Mailings (76.1%), principal (77.3%), and State Department Mailings (73.6%). School principals were felt by the highest percentage (49.1%) to have provided the information sought. Assessments of information accuracy resulted in a similar ranking of data sources. The highest totals for data sources rated as at least "sometimes" accurate were: peers (65.9%); principal (63.9%); TEA mailings (62.9%); State Department Mailings (57.6%).

Results concerning communication sources and quality were generally consistent acrossgrade levels and eligible career levels of survey respondents, and closely paralleled total sample results. When written comments were analyzed in addition to the structured items discussed above, a more strongly negative pattern was evident. Of 109 comments made concerning the role of the State Department--Nashville Staff as a data source, for example, 78% pertained to inaccurate, delayed, or in other ways not useful information. Another 15.6% of comments described experiences or reactions related to unavailable information from this data source, which elicited the greatest number of comments concerning communication. The second highest frequency of comments on this subject was 66 in reference to the State Department Mailings as a data source. Here, 90.9% of the comments described communication as not useful, inaccurate, late, or unclear, with 7.6% reporting helpful information received. Among the other nine data sources listed, no single category was the subject of over 41 comments. Those for which the positive comments exceeded the negative were: principal; Teachers' Study Council; and TEA Mailings.

A second major focus of the instrument was the fast-tracking process used for 1984-85 to facilitate qualification of eligible teachers for Career Level I. This process, in which 83.3% of the 1039 survey respondents reported participating, required successfully completing one of five options: National Teachers Examination-Core Battery; National Teachers Examination-Specialty Area Test; Tennessee Career Ladder Test; Staff Development; or Full Evaluation. Regulations governing each option were set forth in terms of cutoff scores, duration and nature of training or assessment experiences, and other necessary aspects. The fast-tracking concept was positively regarded by the survey respondents, with 30.4% indicating their views were "very positive" and 35.5% "generally favorable". Only 7.1% indicated "strong reservations" concerning this concept, with 18% marking "some concerns" and 9% not responding.

In terms of its actual implementation, several patterns emerged concerning participation preferences and perceived strengths and weaknesses of specific alternative "tracks." As reported in the Part II Report (Handler and Carlson, 1985),

teachers who responded were quite concerned that tests were inappropriate measures for this purpose, while they tended to regard staff development more positively as a fast track option.

The third major portion of the survey dealt with the statewide evaluation process developed for the Career Ladder Program. Before addressing their experiences with each component of that process, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they favor the concept of a statewide teacher evaluation process. Overall, results reflected a low level of support for the concept, with 39.2% making "some concerns," 25.7% "strong reservations," 22.2% "generally favorable," and only 7.0% "very positive" (5.9% no response), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Percentage Responses Concerning Concept of a Statewide Teacher Evaluation Process, by Grade Level and Career Level

	Totals	Very Positive	Generally Favorable	Some Concerns	Strong Reservations	No Response
Grade Level						
Elementary	293	3.8	20.8	43.3	28.0	4.1
Middle School	298	7.7	24.5	40.3	22.8	4.7
High School	448	8.7	21.7	35.7	26.1	7.8
Eligible Career Level						
Probationary	26	19.2	19.2	42.3	11.5	7.7
Apprentice	19	10.5	26.3	52.6	10.5	0.0
Level I	229	7.9	25.8	45.9	18.3	2.2
Level II	186	9.1	26.3	40.9	21.5	2.2
Level III	447	5.8	20.1	36.0	32.0	6.0
No Level Given	82	2.4	15.9	31.7	25.6	24.4
Statewide	1039	7.0	22.2	39.2	25.7	5.9

There were spaces provided on the survey instrument for respondents to list strengths and weaknesses of each career ladder evaluation component. Their comments were analyzed to develop categories and tabulate responses within these. The components eliciting the greatest number of comments were: observation (187); Professional Skills Test (149); peer questionnaire (147); and portfolio (146). Table 3 presents a summary of the content analysis of comments in this area.

Comments concerning the classroom observation were approximately evenly split between strengths (50.8%) and weak

points (49.2%). The strengths most frequently cited dealt with usefulness or appropriateness of the observation and its ability to provide helpful feedback to the teacher. The weaknesses mentioned pertained to its being a poor measure of teaching ability and a technique prone to subjectivity or faulty execution.

Table 3

Percentage Response of Teachers' Comments on Evaluation Process of Career Ladder

Evaluative Comments	Content Cluster*											
	Positive Comments					Total %	Negative Comments					Total %	N
	1	3	5	7	9		2	4	6	8	10		
Observation	33.7	0.0	2.7	4.8	9.6	51	13.4	4.3	20.3	1.2	10.2	49	187
Student Questionnaire	20.5	0.0	0.8	1.5	4.6	27	34.9	0.0	34.1	0.0	3.8	73	132
Peer Questionnaire	21.8	0.7	2.7	0.7	4.8	31	27.9	0.7	37.4	0.7	2.7	69	147
Principal Questionnaire	27.2	0.0	18.5	0.0	2.9	49	22.3	2.9	23.3	0.0	2.9	51	103
Prof. Skills Test	7.4	0.0	0.7	1.3	9.4	19	28.2	2.7	45.0	2.7	2.7	81	149
Candidate Interview	12.1	0.0	0.0	1.6	20.7	34	20.7	13.8	12.1	6.9	12.1	66	116
Portfolio	3.4	0.0	0.0	1.4	11.6	16	20.6	39.0	18.5	0.7	4.8	84	146

*1. Appropriate (e.g. serves purpose, provides useful feedback, objective).
2. Inappropriate (e.g. misuse of time, too subjective, no real purpose).
3. Positive as to time
4. Negative as to time
5. Appropriate measure of teaching
6. Inappropriate measure of teaching
7. Positive experience
8. Negative experience
9. Good idea, conceptually sound
10. Poorly implemented

Nearly all of the 132 remarks about the student questionnaire used in career ladder evaluation were negative. This instrument was intended as a tool that could focus students' attention on actual behaviors rather than general impressions. Although most respondents had not yet directly experienced this particular procedure, 34.9% felt it was not appropriate, too subjective, or a poor use of time, and another 34.1% judged it to be a weak measure of teaching performance. However, 20.5% listed strengths such as providing useful feedback to the teacher and being a good idea for gathering evaluative data.

Two-thirds of the comments regarding the peer questionnaire, a tool administered to three colleagues (chosen from a list of six submitted by the applicant), gave weaknesses perceived in this procedure. Most of these weaknesses concerned a lack

of clear relationship to teaching performance and a high level of subjectivity or potential bias.

Responses pertaining to the principal questionnaire, a form to be filled out concerning the applicant's performance, revealed a distinct split of opinion. While 51.4% of the comments were positive and found this to be an appropriate data source, the other 48.6% of the 103 comments gave opposite views.

The response pattern for the Professional Skills Test as an evaluative tool showed the same type of negative pattern as the student questionnaires. There were fewer than 20% positive comments about this data source, while 45.0% felt it was a poor way to measure teaching ability and another 36.2% indicated other weaknesses related to the test.

The candidate interview was dropped from the career ladder evaluation process shortly before the surveys were distributed. This action resulted from a controversy surrounding the access some teachers had been found to have (largely through TEA workshops) to a field test version of the rating scale used to score the interview. These interviews typically lasted several hours, and teachers frequently reported devoting extensive preparation to assemble documentation for their responses. When survey comments were analyzed, there were nearly twice as many negative (65.5%) as positive (34.5%) responses. Those who were positive felt that the idea was good, and the interview could provide useful information and serve a helpful purpose. The largest number of weaknesses identified dealt with the perceived subjectivity, inappropriateness of purpose, and excessive time requirements of the candidate interview as a data source for the career ladder evaluation process.

The final data source was the portfolio of sample lessons, examples of leadership activities, and other specified types of documentation. This technique was the subject of numerous comments, most of which (83.6%) were unfavorable. Respondents felt that the portfolio required too much time (39.0%), was too subjective or contrived in nature to be a useful source of feedback (20.6%), or was an inappropriate measure of teaching ability. It should be noted that at the time of the survey, actual portfolio reviews had just recently begun by state evaluators. Thus, respondents were largely noting strengths and weaknesses based on their experiences in getting portfolios ready to be assessed, or based on their understandings of what the portfolio entailed and why it was being utilized as a data source.

DISCUSSION

The preceding sections have presented selected major findings from several of the principal data sources utilized in portraying the formulation and installation of Tennessee's Career Ladder Program. In keeping with primary study objectives, issues were identified and their emergence analyzed in the broader context of professional literature as well as experiences in this state. This section highlights some of these critical issues, with other conclusions and implications presented in the full Part II Report (Handler and Carlson, 1985).

The evaluation process utilized to determine teachers' career ladder status is central to the credibility and success of any such program. In Tennessee, the statewide career ladder evaluation process includes multiple data sources, as noted earlier. Formulating and operationalizing the evaluation process has been a tremendously complex undertaking. The Ad Hoc Interim Certification Commission, under the aegis of the State Department of Education, was authorized by the Governor to begin work on developing evaluation procedures during the 1983 legislative session, although the proposed program was not enacted until a 1984 Special Session of the legislature. Governor Alexander, urging support for his master teacher plan, had written that: "Teachers know better than anyone else how to evaluate and grade others' performance. How do you determine a student's grade every six weeks for English composition, for music, for art, or for speech? Is evaluating a teacher's performance every five years any more difficult? (Alexander, 1983, p. 14)" Subsequent events have amply demonstrated that this task is, in fact, a great deal more difficult, particularly when the professional, political, and personal stakes are as high as they have been in the process of implementing the Tennessee Career Ladder Program.

Before taking action to create a set of procedures, for example, work by the Rand Corporation and others underscores the importance of deciding on a clear purpose for conducting the evaluations. Different purposes such as improvement or accountability must be considered according to the pertinent organizational level (e.g. determining individual status or school status) when planning how to evaluate (Wise, 1984). The Tennessee evaluation model aspires to help teachers improve. It includes post-observation conferences which might serve as opportunities to receive useful feedback, and an end of year summary conference for career ladder applicants to tell them exactly where they were strong or deficient. During the first year of implementation, opportunities for interim performance feedback did not materialize for many teachers. Evaluators were not consistent in providing such information, and their training had not emphasized this role.

Although the Tennessee model gives some attention to the improvement role, teachers appear to perceive it as a vehicle for making job status decisions and determining their "fate" as to certification and salary supplements. Including as it does a set of minimum competency screens, and based as it is on a relatively generic set of behaviors, the system may also be inferred to have an orientation toward establishing some "least common denominators" of teaching. Those who score the highest number of points in the prescribed areas are judged to rank at the upper career levels (provided they have the requisite years of experience) and are pronounced excellent teachers.

Another issue that has surfaced in the movement to institute career ladders for teachers is the appropriate role of research findings. In Tennessee as elsewhere, the evaluation instruments and lists of criteria or competencies being measured were based in large part on available research literature. Since much of this literature was derived from elementary classrooms and focused on a fairly narrow set of instructional practices, early reliance on "the researach" was gradually modified, although not without controversy. Rosenholtz (1984), who played a role in the initial formulation of Tennessee's evaluation competencies and was involved in early conflicts over this issue, has continued to emphasize the need to develop criteria that are known to relate to the improvement of student learning. Prominent researcher Walter Doyle has cautioned that: "Research relates to practice not as a source of prescriptions or as a blueprint for all teachers to follow under all circumstances. Rather, research results define a continually growing knowledge base for interpreting classroom events and constructing situationally appropriate ways of managing learning opportunities" (Doyle, 1984, p. 57). Bird (1984) echoes this appeal to avoid using research findings as uniform standards for evaluating teaching.

Whenever evaluation standards or procedures are discussed, it is likely that the term "objectivity" will be used. The Tennessee system was designed, particularly in its sensitive first year, to achieve a high level of objectivity. Instruments and procedures were designed with low inference responses and cross-checking built in whenever possible. Further, every component on each of theseveral data sources was assigned a specific weight by a designated committee, creating a complex point value structure. Although certain aspects of the point system were presented in the original Teacher Orientation Manual (1984), interviews and surveys revealed that the determination of scores was not widely understood and the objectivity of the procedures used to gather data was in doubt among many teachers.

Among the generalizations concerning the evaluation process that may be made on the basis of this study are:

1. The extent to which teacher/educator input is used and the timing of this involvement represents an important influence on subsequent acceptance of the process.

2. Teachers should be informed clearly, promptly, and in detail about the evaluation procedures and related policies.

3. The evaluation procedures should be simplified to reduce confusion, anxiety, and paperwork/preparation.

4. Instruments should have credibility as indicators of teaching performance and reflect a clear set of assumptions about successful teacher behavior.

5. Prompt, consistent feedback for improvement should be provided early in the evaluation process.

6. Ample time and resources should be invested in training evaluators, who should reach high skill levels in assessment strategies and interpersonal communication.

7. The human impact of such large scale changes in evaluation, practices should be considered.

The first six guidelines derive largely from the experiences of Tennessee teachers and their principals, and each can be readily acted on by concerned decision makers. The final guideline will require further study under sensitive, concerned leadership so that teacher morale is not irreparably damaged through unintended consequences of the Career Ladder.

In addition to evaluation issues, several crucial aspects of working conditions have played noteworthy roles in the early stages of Tennessee's Career Ladder Program. Teachers repeatedly expressed, for instance, feelings of being torn between apparently conflicting expectations. A number of those interviewed and surveyed indicated that they felt obliged to spend long hours in preparation of portfolios, interview documentation, studying for tests, and so forth. At the same time, they reported anxiety or frustration over the time lost from their classroom instruction or preparation. Although this level of effort was not the intent of program designers, these internal conflicts undoubtedly had implications for the schools and classrooms where career ladder applicants worked. It will be important to continue to study the extent to which such ambiguity over roles and expectations persists as the program continues. Researchers have already obtained indications that career ladders and similar performance incentive structures may in fact increase levels of uncertainty, vulnerability, and insecurity of teachers (Goodwin, 1985). Probable reasons for this can already be inferred, but additional time is needed to determine the stability of this apparent side-effect.

Costs, too, represents an issue that has required considerable attention in Tennessee and can be expected to figure prominently in any serious discussion of career ladders. In this state, ensuring a lasting source of support has led to major legislative struggles and promises to be a continuing concern. Teachers have expressed considerable skepticism over the long term fiscal stability of the program. They also expressed concern that the large amounts of money being spent for the Career Ladder, particularly in terms of its administration and related publicity efforts, have not instead been directed toward school or classroom level improvements. While arguments clearly can be advanced favoring either side of this issue, decision makers would be well advised to study long as well as short range cost analyses and plan to inform constituents of the nature of the necessary expenditures as well as the projections and strategies for future funding.

Events in Tennessee underscore the critical role played by management and policy issues in instituting career ladder structures. Unfortunately, perhaps, for those involved in the early stages of implementation in this state, substantial difficulties occurred with communication, data management, and responding to the significant number of special situations that often required policy decisions after the program had already begun. These problems have had repercussions difficult to reverse, particularly in terms of teacher and public perceptions of the Career Ladder Program. It is unclear at this initial phase of implementation the extent to which substantive strengths or weaknesses of the program (e.g. the incentives offered, the evaluation process used, and the career differentiation established) are being masked or exaggerated by related management considerations. Although further study of this interaction is needed, it seems reasonable to infer that management of information and of resources are key determinants of successful career ladder operation. These activities require thorough planning and adequate funding. For example, apparently clear cut decisions such as how much information teachers were entitled to concerning evaluative rating scales and point values were among those that assumed considerable importance at various stages of implementation. It has become clear through the Tennessee experience, in fact, that efficient data handling may be one of the most critical tasks associated with a system of this sort. Computer errors that delayed some batches of bonus checks were, for example, magnified by communication problems and headline-grabbing media reports into major events that continued to trouble local school personnel as well as state officials and career ladder applicants.

The influence of the Career Ladder Program for teachers must be recognized as touching on many aspects of education in Tennessee. By obtaining a substantial portion of the resources devoted to educational reform, it has implicitly reduced the attention that can be paid to other important needs. It has already begun to alter relationships among teachers and between teachers and administrators. It is expected to influence the relationships between teachers and parents as well, and changes in the general public's view of teachers are not unlikely in view of the fairly extensive media coverage of this program. With these being just a few of the diverse areas of influence, one must strongly urge that serious efforts be made to investigate such ramifications of the Tennessee program.

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